DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER VII.

MIMIC WAR.

Must he be poisoned with rough, heady port, to whom the clean and silky contents of Margaux is as mother's milk?—or must he starve upon roast mutton, whose appetite has been hitherto appeased with *salmis de bécasses*?

No, you cannot break through the habits of a life-time with an effort; you cannot reclaim the eagle whose untamed youth has matured in his lofty eyrie, and lure him to your fist like a sparrow-hawk; neither can you expect that the young patrician, whose boyhood has been undisciplined and uncontrolled, shall suddenly assume with manhood the principles and habits which it costs years of self-denial to acquire. He will go on as he has begun, and when hopelessly involved, and irretrievably ruined, it will be well if he confine himself to preying upon the unoffending tradesman, and do not carry his depredations into the class of society to which he belongs.

We are apt to attach a certain degree of credit to the expression, 'living by one's wits,' and rather respect the individual who exists as being a very clever fellow; but if we consider for one moment to what especial profession we apply the term, we shall detect it a less enviable distinction. What is the man who lives by his wits, in fact, but one who trades upon the want of the essentials in another?—who makes use of his own greater dexterity, better information, or more favorable luck, to fill his pockets at the expense of his friends and associates?—who loses no opportunity of getting the better of the very man whose roof shelters him, and whose bread he eats? And is this a worthy occupation for the well-born scion of a long line of chivalrous ancestors?—is this a fitting station for one in whose veins the pure old Norman blood course unstained? When the mailed grasp of his warlike sire closed but upon the knightly lance, shall his degenerate fingers wield only the covetous pencil of a betting-book? Shall the noble steed, the generous auxiliary, the very source of the old champion's fame, be to his descendant but an unconscious machine of fraud and disgrace? And yet to such shifts as these may be driven the noblest of the land, by a bad education and the exigencies of a false position.

I have only stated the facts of the case as they may have come under the observation of most of us. Let wiser heads than mine propose the remedy.

But in return to Flora, as I now found myself calling her in my day-dreams, the attachment, sprung up amidst the noise and turmoil of the review, grew and flourished in the worldly atmosphere of a London season. Unaided Mrs. Montrap, I made no further inquiries as to Coram, and the first time I saw her again, pirouetting as a sylphide in her vocation, she studiously avoided coming towards my box, and showed no inclination to renew our strange acquaintanceship. I went less to Crockford's, and when there, shunned the little room, and lined a good deal at Colonel Belmont's whose cook would have completely destroyed the stomach of any man whose heart was not attached. I took to morning walks in Kensington Gardens, where, quite incident[illegible], I used to come across Miss Belmont, promenading, under the guardianship of a [illegible] grim personage, who, having [illegible] in childhood, now acted as [illegible] to my lady [illegible] were very pleasant walks, and [illegible] back to that peaceful time as a [illegible] in the waste of my [illegible]. I hope may [illegible] of Kensington Gardens, but for my part I love those trim [illegible] as well as any [illegible] further afloat, and [illegible] and blackened [illegible] Meyers Hotel and the learned sons of Nimrod themselves. But I confess that I was never prone to be captivated by prowess such as this; and have even had the bad taste to think that these heroines would have been infinitely more fascinating sitting at home with their feet upon the fender and perpetrating worsted-work, ay, even although it should entail the very counting of the stitches themselves.

No Diana of the Ephesians was Flora. She possessed a bay mare that she thought and believed perfection, for whose prowess she entertained the greatest respect and admiration, not unmingled with fear; and, truth to say, the bay mare was a good-looking animal enough, and with her mistress on her back, completed a very charming pair; and alongside of this bay mare it was my greatest pleasure to saunter, regardless of the good Colonel, who occupied the other flank, and who was sure to pick up some old friend or companion-in-arms, with whom he interchanged a considerable amount of twaddle, whilst Flora and I rode on in that sweet communion of kindred spirits which is even more delightful, when tempered with a degree of doubt and uncertainty, that when the fatal words, once spoken, have given to the relation existing between the twain a decided character and a name.

'There is that horrid woman again,' would Flora say to me, as we paced up and down the crowded 'ride,' and in each oft repeated turn encountered the rounded form of Mrs. Man-trap, on her showy steed. 'What makes her stare so? would add my gentle companion, as the bold eyes and saucy smile would greet me with a meaning nod. I felt instinctively, I know not why, that I had made an enemy, and ever after, receiving and returning the salute of my *ci-devant* goddess, I felt a creeping sensation of impending evil that was unaccountable as it seemed absurd.

Gradually, as these rides went on, and I became a more and more familiar guest at *the house of Colonel Belmont*, I found myself relapsing in society into the grade of an 'engaged man, and consequently of less and less account amongst the ball-giving damsels of my acquaintance. People began to nod to me with a meaning smile, and one or two intimate friends of my own had already (the profane and confirmed bachelors!) 'hoped it wasn't true,' and begged to know when I was to be turned off. And yet I had never spoken a word that could be construed into a proposal by Miss Belmont, or muted my intentions to the good old Colonel. However, I had thought a good deal about it myself, and had made up my mind that it was absolutely essential for Flora's happiness as for mine, *that we should spend* the rest of our lives together as man and wife, this infatuation being the more confirmed by my own restlessness and discomfort, when the illness of a near relative occasioned the temporary absence of Belmonts from London. I began seriously to think of rushing into matrimony, and withdrawing myself from all the dissipations and follies of the world, for which I deserved the less credit, as the London season was now rapidly dwindling to its close. I took to leading a rational and manly kind of life, depending upon my brother officers for society, and entering ardently into all those vigorous sports and athletic exercises so popular with the young officers of 'the brigade.'

It was our greatest delight on those fine summer mornings to rush down to the margin of dirty and venerable Father Thames, and, embarking in a four-oar, dash merrily up the river to breakfast, in the time-honored parlor of the Red House—an edifice, alas! to be swept away by the disparaging march of modern improvement. No more shall the jovial crew, leaping from their shallop, rush headlong to the charge, and demolish a breakfast, such as these alone dare to face who sharpened by the keen, early morning air, and digestions fortified by the vigor of an athletic condition. No more shall the cool and unerring shot level his steady rifle, as the quietly lays two upon the gun, and ere the 'blue rock,' swift as the children of air, rises three feet from the opening trap, mows him down upon the sward with a rapidity and precision that [illegible] a golden [illegible] Meyers Hotel and even so does it behove the well-trained crew to throw the whole vigor of their stalwart shoulders and lithe, athletic forms, into those concluding efforts that are to shoot their quivering bark to the shore, and, as Jack Emery, the best of fellows and most skilled of watermen, calls it, 'bring her in handsome.' Willingly do we bend to the task, and just as we are speeding along at our best and are thinking, some of us, that lungs and muscle will not last forever, the welcome 'easy' poises every oar above the surface, as though arrested in mid-stroke by a charm, 'and rowed of all' followed by the rattling of the thole-pins, and the immediate loosening of every tongue, that has hitherto been too short of breath to speak, as our long taper oars are shipped, and our fairy keel grates against the shingle of the destined port. Out jumps the bow-oar, armed with a boat-hook, and, bold as a Captain Cook amongst the savages, and leaving our careful waterman to secure the boat, we rush tumultuously in to breakfast.

With constant practice, under the able tuition of the 'professional' above-mentioned, we formed no despicable crew, for amateurs, at that time. Maltby, who was always present with his regiment during the summer, in order that his leave might commence in November, a month whose saddened hues and leafless copses were far dearer to the enthusiastic fox-hunter than all the luxuriance of glorious June—Maltby took the office of 'stroke,' and acquitted himself as so keen a spirit and stalwart a frame were likely to do in that responsible situation. Hillingdon, with his calm, pale face, his lithe frame, and indomitable pluck, pulled No. 2. My duty was to labor like a galley-slave, with straining sinews and grinning countenance, at No. 3; whilst Tom Tuft, a pocket hercules in frame, a dismounted Bacchus in habits, wielded the bow-oar and flourished the boat-hook with a vigor and a quaintness all his own.

Such a crew, in such training, were no unworthy foes even for the top-sawyers of the Goosander Club; and as it would have been a sad pity that so much energy and condition should be thrown away, articles were entered into, at my instigation, that we should make a match with a certain chosen four of that aquatic body, to enliven the dull season of an autumn in London, and furnish food for the columns of the weekly sporting journals. My old habits were sufficiently strong within me to induce me to get, by every means in my power, the best information as to the pace of our antagonists, and the time in which they did their several distances; on comparing which with our own, it appeared to me that there was money to be made out of the proceedings, *and that if* we could only keep Tom Tuft from the decanters and the beer barrel, we ought to make a pretty good certainty of winning. After a great deal of discussion, called by the vulgar chaff, time, place, and distance were arranged, and our respective crews having decided upon the color of their Jerseys, and the capabilities of their steerers, went into strong training forthwith. I cannot answer for the diet prescribed to them, or the particular regimen adopted by Messrs. Ruffles, Mallard, Stretcher, and Bower, our four laborious adversaries, but I can only bear witness to the perseverance with which our own crew discussed raw mutton-chops and porter at each *period when exhausted nature required refreshment*. I have ever since loathed the taste of beer, and appreciated most heartily the scientific transformation of a skilful cook. Day after day we fed like cannibals, and worked like Helots. Day after day, the skin got clearer, the muscles harder, and the face thinner, till at last we boasted that we were not to be blown by pace or exhausted by labor. Once only Tom Tuft was granted a dispensation from the severity of our rules, and allowed to dine out with an aunt in Eaton Square, whom it would have been impolite to offend. But the aunt possessed a store of a certain dry old port, and by cross-examination of her butler, an office I took upon myself, I discovered *that Master Thomas had* drunk thereof two whole bottles to his own cheek during the very short interval that he was left alone in the dining-room, whilst coffee was being prepared up-stairs. We allowed no more concerning engagements till the match was over, and then [illegible] tested *race by a length*, I have but a vague recollection of the events of the match, it is all confused and misty as the dim perceptions of a dream. There was the shooting rush of our keel and the ripple of the water in our wake, keeping melodious time to the roll of the oars, as they feathered regularly in their rullocks; sounds echoed indistinctly from the adversary, which, like some phantom-boat, still hovered near,—now alongside, now on our track, now drawing slightly in advance;—there was the steersman's eager face peering at times over Maltby's shoulder, as he bent to and fro with every jerk of the dancing craft, as though he, too, were helping her along;—there were the swelling *muscles of Maltby's back and shoulders*, rising and falling, as our stalwart captain bent gallantly to his oar; there was the hot breath of the calm and indomitable Hillingdon fanning my bare neck at regular intervals, as he laid his lengthy frame well forward to the sweeping stroke; there was my own blood boiling with labor and excitement, and the indescribable exhilaration of spirits, arising from severe muscular exertion and the unfailing determination to die rather than give in. Once and once was I only able to steal a look at the other boat; it was towards the close of the contest, and we were slightly ahead. There was but one word spoken by any of our crew, and its effect was electrical. 'Now!' said Maltby, as with *redoubled vigor* he strained to the task;—'Now!' grasped Hillingdon, behind me, in a sepulchral whisper through his grinding teeth—and 'Now!' I repeated, as with desperate energy, I tugged at my resisting oar. The monosyllable did it!—I know not how or when, but having pulled as I never pulled before, and hope never to pull again, having outlasted by sheer 'condition' the unfair tax upon nature which such efforts demand, I had the satisfaction of knowing that, after a severe and well-contested struggle, we beat our adversaries on the goal by a short boat's-length.

Let me draw a veil over the triumph, and the dinner, composed of both crews, which celebrated it. Tom Tuft took the chair, and however many bottles he owed himself for his abstinence and self-denial, I think he must have paid them all up.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHOOTING PARTY.

It was now about the middle of August, and the excitement of our boat-race being over, London began to get insufferably hot, dusty, and stupid; everybody had left town, and the very waiters in the clubs were looking forward to their little excursion to the sea-side. St. Heliers had been absent on the Continent for the last six weeks, and was the person I should have least expected to meet, when, to my surprise, one hot and languid afternoon, as I sauntered listlessly down St. James's Street, I discovered that the only other individual occupying the pavement of that once crowded resort was St. Heliers himself—en route, as he immediately informed me, for the best moor and the most comfortable shooting-lodge in the north of Scotland; 'where, Digby, my boy,' added the good-natured peer, 'if you *will come down with me, I shall be* happy to give you lots of grouse, an occasional deer, and a good deal of that old claret you so highly approve.' I jumped at the offer, and having with little difficulty obtained sufficient leave from my military duties, that very night saw me, in company with my noble host, occupying a *coupee* of the London and North-Western Railway, and in defiance of directors' bye-laws, and forty-shilling penalties, filling it with the fumes of the choicest and most fragrant of cigars. And now, I think I cannot illustrate St. Heliers' views upon men and and things, including women, better than by detailing a conversation which took place between us, as we sped along northward at the rate of forty miles an hour, and which he opened by an observation on which he called the mistaken notion of marrying at my time of life. 'What is this I hear, Digby,' said he, between the puffs of his cigar, 'about you and Miss Belmont? Of course you don't miss a Derby—but how will it do to exchange Lavish's drag and the joility of luncheon on the course, for a drive in an open carriage in all weathers as far as the turnpike and back, more particularly if Mrs. Grand should happen to be nervous, and, what is no unusual effect, becomes cross when she is frightened? I pass over all the minor annoyances of squalling children (instead of the opera, at which I happen to know you are a pretty constant attendant), squabbling servants, smoky chimneys, windows that let the water run through them, and drains that do not; neither will I dwell upon the petty details of what housekeepers call sundries, such as mops, brooms, toothpicks, soap, soda, and sand-paper, all of which somebody must look into; but I will only ask you calmly and dispassionately to reflect for an instant on the galling restraint, the intolerable discomfort it would be to a man of your habits and pursuits, to be obliged to maintain a respectability of demeanor, and to behave himself with propriety on all occasions.'

The gravity with which my monitor propounded this last objection, as if it were indeed a poser, was too much for both of us, and bursts of laughter prevented the possibility of our carrying on the conversation with the seriousness the subject demanded; but as I drew my travelling cap over my brows, and composed myself to sleep in my corner, I could not help thinking how thoroughly the man of the world had exposed his own character, his own intense regard for self, in the matrimonial lecture with which, in really intended kindness, he treated me. I saw what he meant: I knew there was a great deal to be given up—that if, in my position, I chose to marry, I must forego luxuries, and do without excitement; of all this I was aware, and fully conscious that the sacrifice might cost me many a sigh; but still, I thought, there are many pleasures enjoyed by those who live for others rather than themselves, of which I am as yet wholly ignorant. Man is not intended to exert all his highest energies for his own gratification—the reflected happiness of another should be the grateful happiness to ourselves, and we increase our sources of enjoyment as we increase our responsibilities. With all his wit, all his plausible arguments and unsparing ridicule, my better nature told me that St. Heliers was wrong. And yet—and yet, I pondered and hesitated, marriage was a serious undertaking; I would put it off a little; the present, as usual, was my first object. I had a delightful six weeks of sport to anticipate, and as many a wiser man has done on a far more important subject, I shrunk from coming to a final decision till 'some more convenient season.'

In the meantime, we soon arrived at St. Heliers' picturesque lodge in a far north, now, in these days of steam, brought within a comparitively easy [illegible] once a good fortnight's toil, [illegible] rugged with its fr[illegible] boundless moors, and [illegible] as if civilization h[illegible] those fastnesses—th[illegible] cock and the mallar[illegible] the tameless eagle. [illegible] met together to enj[illegible] and the most unde[illegible] tramping and toiling. [illegible] rugged mountain an[illegible] assembled nightly [illegible] table. Jack Lavish [illegible] and the life and so[illegible] Martingale, who co[illegible] Norfolk itself cannot [illegible] ever prepared to bac[illegible] 'the grooves,' the '[illegible] rod,' for any amoun[illegible] credulous might cho[illegible] mean auxiliary on t[illegible] panion over the mahogany; and he, too, was one of the select assemblage. My kindest friend and favorite associate, the talented and romantic Hillingdon, who, with all his love of the picturesque and fondness for travel had never been in Scotland, was expected at the end of the week; and with such companions, Highland sport, Highland scenery, and, above all, Highland air, what more could mortal man desire? My first day's grouse-shooting, in company with our host himself, will serve as a specimen of the manner in which we passed our mornings; our